

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 187795

65

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 187795

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOPN, MOPS, MARR, RP

SUBJECT:PHILIPPINE PRESS

1. WASHINGTON POST ON JULY 21 CARRIED ARTICLE BY BERNARD WIDEMAN HEADLINED "U.S. NAVY SCAPEGOAT IN MANILA". STORY REPORTED RECENT CASES OF FILIPINO FISHERMEN ALLEGEDLY KILLED BY U.S. NAVY BOMBS OR WOUNDED IN ALLEGED MACHINE GUN ATTACK. LEAD-OFF SENTENCE ACCUSES MARCOS GOVT OF USING THE CASE OF THE FOUR DEAD FISHERMEN TO STIR UP ANTI-U.S. SENTIMENT DURING BASE NEGOTIATIONS. ARTICLE SAYS ALTHOUGH PHILIPPINE OFFICIALS EXONERATED U.S. NAVY OF RESPONSIBILITY IN THE INCIDENT, LITTLE COVERAGE HAS BEEN GIVEN IN MANILA PRESS TO THE OFFICIAL FINDINGS. IN CONTRAST, THE ORIGINAL REPORTS OF THE DEATHS PROMPTED HARSH ANTI-AMERICAN COMMENTARY.

2. AT ITS DISCRETION, EMBASSY SHOULD SEEK OPPORTUNITY TO
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PAGE 02 STATE 187795

POINT OUT TO PHIL NEGOTIATORS AND OTHER GOP OFFICIALS THAT

FISHERMEN STORY AND MANILA PRESS HANDLING OF IT HAS BEEN PUBLICIZED IN U.S. AND THAT THIS SORT OF PUBLICITY NOT ONLY MAY BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE FOR GOP IN IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF NEGOTIATIONS BUT WILL ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD PHILIPPINES IN U.S. CONGRESS, WHICH HAS ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY OF APPROVING BASE AGREEMENT AND

APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION. THE EMBASSY MAY ALSO WISH TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS: WE HAVE UPHELD OUR SHARE OF THE BARGAIN STRUCK AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEGOTIATIONS BY NOT BACKGROUNDING AMERICAN NEWSMEN, DESPITE REQUESTS, ON THE DETAILS OF THE BASE TALKS, OR IN ANY OTHER WAY ATTEMPTING TO STIMULATE PUBLIC EMOTIONS. WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE GOP WOULD SEEK TO KEEP THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF OUR NEGOTIATIONS ON AS UNEMOTIONAL PLANE AS POSSIBLE BUT FIND THAT A GOOD SHARE OF THE GUIDED PRESS' COMMENTARY APPEARS AIMED AT PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE.

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